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Calida A. Barboza, "From Digits to Diagrams: Using Infographics to Inform Database Retention and Cancellation Decisions" (2013). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315321>

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From Digits to Diagrams: Using Infographics to Inform Database Retention and Cancellation Decisions

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Abstract

This paper describes a poster presentation about how Ithaca College librarians used an infographic displaying the relationships among databases to make retention and cancellation decisions for the 2013–2014 fiscal year. The diagram, which was created to help selectors more easily understand how canceling one database would affect subscriptions to other databases, also shows the impact of the resources' interconnectedness on cost. A modified sample of the illustration is reproduced in this report. Design considerations and the tools used to create the image will also be discussed.

Background

While making electronic resources budget decisions for the 2012–2013 fiscal year, Ithaca College Librarian Lis Chabot mentioned that it was difficult to keep track of how canceling one database could result in the unintended cancellation of other resources. In response to this problem, an infographic was created to help librarian selectors more quickly see the interconnectedness of the Library's database subscriptions.

Information Gathering and Design Process

Information about the Ithaca College Library's 2012–2013 database subscriptions and freely-available databases was gathered from hard-copy invoices; the integrated library system; e-mails; spreadsheets; staff; and publisher, provider, and consortia web sites. The accuracy of the infographic's content was verified with the assistance of Electronic and Technical Services Librarian Karin Wikoff and was supplemented by her historical knowledge of the databases the Library is entitled to have access to as a result of paid subscriptions and organizational memberships. Access to these supplemental databases was verified with the appropriate organization.

Adobe Illustrator was used to create the infographic because of the program's ability to batch change the styles of objects and because it is an industry standard vector graphics software which allows graphics to be resized without

distortion or loss of details. Library Technology Specialist Dan Taylor was consulted for advice on which program to use because of his knowledge of graphic design principles and programs and because of his experience designing the Library's promotional materials, signage, and web site. He also provided art direction and design feedback on the diagram, an excerpt of which is seen in Figure 1.

Database packages are placed on the left side of the diagram and are separated from fee-based, direct-from-vendor subscriptions. Single and double-headed arrows indicate the relationships of databases and packages to each other. Most databases that are not connected to any others (which tend to be those directly licensed from the vendor) are on the right side of the infographic because canceling them would have the least impact on the cancellation of other databases. Freely available databases are toward the bottom because cutting access to these resources would not benefit the Library financially.

Fee-based subscription databases are identified by a green circle with a white dollar sign inside because both the color green and the dollar symbol are common visual indicators of money. No-fee access is represented by the same symbol with a variation of the International Organization for Standardization's "no" symbol (red circle with diagonal red line from top left to bottom right) on top of it.

Databases that were marked for cancellation are outlined in red to draw attention to them. They are connected to databases (outlined in black)

that were acquired using the newly available funds. Rectangles of alternating gray and white horizontal lines set apart canceled resources from active subscriptions, which are represented by solid blocks of color. The colors signify the entities through which access to the databases is mediated.

The meanings of all symbols appearing in the infographic are explained in the key in the bottom right of the diagram.

Results

The infographic eased collection development decision making regarding electronic database subscriptions for the 2013–2014 fiscal year because fewer sources needed to be consulted to find out how canceling one database would affect the others. The diagram made it apparent to librarians that, in some cases, it was not possible to cancel a database subscription without canceling an entire package. This tool will continue to benefit the Ithaca College Library in future years as long as it is updated as changes occur.

Use of this resource contributed to the librarians' ability to prepare for a flat-funded electronic resources budget by making it easier to identify potential cost savings. Along with the diagram, cost and usage data for the subscription databases, holdings overlap information, and faculty input informed the following decisions resulting in a cost savings of approximately \$15,000:

- Canceling Biography in Context (Gale)
- Canceling Marquis Who's Who
- Switching from Literature Online with MLA to only MLA International Bibliography (ProQuest)
- Canceling Classical Scores Library Volumes I and II (Alexander Street Press) and Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals (EBSCO), and picking up Naxos Video Library

Conclusion

While creating this database infographic, it became clear that some information resided only in the memories of long-time staff and was not documented. The librarians learned that the cost-per-search statistics that have been collected in previous years are misleading because they do not account for the bundled nature of some products.

Future iterations of the diagram will include number of simultaneous users, total price of the database or package, if the fee paid is a content or access fee, and cost per search. The addition of this information will ease future decision making as all relevant information will be in the same place. Repercussions of canceling a database, such as access fees for perpetual access e-books on the platform of the canceled database, will also be added. The diagram serves an additional purpose of making it easier for the electronic resources librarian to keep track of these connections. The infographic is expected to retain its value should the library need to plan for flat funding or budget reduction in the future.